

ELSIE FERGUSON'S NEW PLAY



Martha Hedman in "THE BOOMERANG"

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

THE New York stage would be improved by more works of the character of "The Fear Market," which Amelia Rives wrote for the Booth Theatre. The number of plays of New York life which reaches the stage every year is small. In such a play as the new one at the Booth and in "The New York Idea" which Grace George revived so brilliantly at the Playhouse, the locality is of the essence of the play. What happens in "The Fear Market" could not happen anywhere else in America. The same was in a lesser degree true of "The New York Idea."

Why New York sees so few dramas devoted to its special interests is not clear. Of course all the plays that are acted in Paris and London with few exceptions have their place of action in one or the other of these cities. In Germany Berlin is less of a centre than the capital of either of the other countries, since some cities such as Munich and Dresden have an independent social existence and the decentralization is there greater than in England or France. In Austria there is no longer any exclusive use of Vienna as the site of the plays of Austrian origin and more probably there are more plays produced in Budapest than there are in Vienna with their scenes laid there. Then there is a more or less active Bohemian drama in the theatre which acts its plays in Czech at Prague. So Austria is more like our own stage in selecting various places for its dramatic background.

There is a wide field in this city for the American playwright, but it does not appear to appeal strongly to him. It would be interesting to see more of it. And there is not the slightest necessity that it should all move in one groove. Eugene Walter in his New York scenes in "Paid in Full" and "The Eastway" struck a genuine note that was readily recognized by all who delighted in this unusual transfer of genuine New York life to the stage.

All there was of real New York in "Paid in Full" was the little bouncer Jimmy Gilpin, who will always be remembered with affection by all who saw him incarnated in the person of Frank Craven. Mr. Sheldon's "Romance" had a delightful flavor of old New York, which is another period to which the playwrights have been singularly indifferent. The effort to make a play out of "The House of Mirth" was in itself so abortive that its scene might have been the Sandwich Islands. What could be done with

"The Custom of the Country" by a playwright, not by some person with even less sense of what the stage required than Mrs. Wharton herself? It seems idle to speculate on that topic, as the work would probably be handed over to some amateur bungler who ever to be prepared for the stage. Mrs. Wharton's critics have always found the book behind the times and said that such a family as that which came out of the West should in reality have reached the Hotel Stentorian twenty years ago. That does not seem altogether just, but it would not in any case make any difference, since the theatre is always twenty years behind every other art.

There is every quality in the life of New York at the present day to stimulate the imagination of the dramatist. There are culture and refinement, there are pretence and vulgarity, there is the raw material of the awful second generation, which is just now the curse of life in this city, while opposed to these imported and alien elements there is the repose and certainty of our cultivated classes, with generations of education and wealth back of them, facing the rich intruder from the further west—all are boiling and sputtering splendidly in our melting pot. No other society in the world ought to be so stirring to the imagination of the playwright.

There is only one new play this week, but that is fortunately to return Elsie Ferguson to the New York stage. So all the lovers of good acting may rejoice. Miss Ferguson is to-day the most distinguished young actress of the American theatre. It has rarely happened that such expert technical skill has been combined with such allurements of youth and beauty. But Miss Ferguson has acquired the means of her art while she is still young enough to employ them in the service of young womanhood. It is in contemplating what she can accomplish to-day that the injustice of recurring to the paucity of the profession as the only inspiration to praise seems most unjust, diverting as that occupation may be.

Is it possible to evoke a lovelier figure from the past? Old pictures of the celebrities of an earlier period sometimes seem to. Photographs to-day of Blanche Pierson, Sophie Crozette and Sarah Bernhardt in their golden prime sometimes suggest a distinction and finish which are not to be found to-day among our women of the stage. But it would be difficult to find among any of them, whether the Paris stage be selected or the English of that earlier period, who could excel in beauty and distinction Miss Ferguson as she is to-day. So New York is eager to welcome her to-morrow night.

She never yet has had a play worthy of her talents, but let us hope that "Margaret Schiller" at least shows her to as much advantage as "The Strange Woman" and "Outcast." How much easier was the chance of those beautiful days of the period to which we have just been referring. In the case of Agnes Ethel, Rose Eytling and Clara Morris in our own country the task was also easier. Playwrights in France were just then turning out roles of the kind that showed the talents of these actresses at their best. Think of the opportunity to create Gilberte, who survived for two score years as a beloved stage figure, even to play the errand lady of the camellias, when it was not difficult to keep the face straight at every one of the inflated dialogues, to act *Alce or Cora or Rose Michel or Miss Maudlin or Mercy Merrick* or any of the rest of the emotional sisterhood with their feverish lives. Those were the days for the actress who was ticketed as "emotional," and there were reputations made then with less difficulty than they are to-day.

How Miss Ferguson would have revelled in the opportunities of that time. Not one of the characters named here would have been acted by her without being richer in feeling or more alluring or distinguished or exquisite from the fact that she had imparted



Justine Johnstone in "STOP! LOOK! LISTEN!"

her own qualities to them. In the meantime it will perhaps be toward enough to await what the play to-morrow night will give us of the talent and beauty of this gifted actress.

One of the amusing vanities of the American manager is to become a "producer" so soon as he is in a position to follow out his own wishes. He may have owned a laundry or labored in the halls of the fickle goddess of chance or served any of the elevating apprenticeships common to American impresarios, and all equally remote from any qualification to be a stage manager. Put him once, however, in the position of acting as the sublimated stage manager, for this is what the producer is, and he will take this responsibility on his shoulders without a struggle. Indeed so soon as the manager is in a position to have his demands enforced he sets out to put every play of his own on the stage in accordance with his own ideas. It is unnecessary to observe that in ten cases out of a dozen these ideas are radically wrong.

But they never interfere with the ambitions of the American manager, however, to impress his artistic ideas on the public by the vicarious means of the actors under his control. Of course the victims not important enough to struggle must surrender all initiative and do as they are told. The contempt which actors of talent and experience inevitably feel for such training, so long as they are able to express it, does not fail to reach the manager. But this disposition is one of the most fatal to any artistic standard of production on the American stage. The actor manager, the author or the actor may be relied upon to provide something for a play. But what in the world is to come from the manager with only his business sense to guide him?

It is this lack of confidence in the artistic judgment of their employers which makes it impossible for them to correct the faults of those who are under them and unable to resist the temptation to fall into bad artistic habits. How many of these there are, too. But who is to correct this woman or that man when the emphasis of peculiarities has grown too strong and when artistic conscience has been allowed to slumber for the sake of the easy effect, the exaggeration of the personal peculiarity, the excessive play given to the personality. Certainly their managers never dare say anything to them. The players have seen them in the act of "producing" and they know the limits of their artistic judgment.

NEW PLAYS OF THE WEEK.

Elsie Ferguson Has a Piece by Hall Caine at the New Amsterdam.

Concerning the new play in which Elsie Ferguson will be seen at the New Amsterdam Theatre to-morrow night the following is communicated: "Margaret Schiller" is Hall Caine's first play in several years and in point of fact his first original contribution to the literature of the stage. All his earlier works that have reached the footlights have been dramatizations of his own novels. The new play has its first public presentation in this country instead of London.

"Although in a sense a war play, no soldier appears upon the stage in 'Margaret Schiller.' Dealing with war, it

does not touch upon its horrors. The author shows rather its effect upon the minds and hearts of people belonging to warring nations. Margaret Schiller, the part played by Miss Ferguson, who is the central figure in Mr. Caine's play, sets out to destroy the man she believes to be her country's arch enemy. She ends by saving his life. Her enthusiasm for the cause of her native land and her intense hatred of the British invade her in a plot against Sir Robert Temple, the Prime Minister. She is strongly emotional, brilliant, resourceful, but her bitter enmity centres upon the individual rather than an organized and recognized state of society. The Sir Robert Temple she has pictured and the real Sir Robert are very different. The story of the play brings these two characters into aggressive conflict, a conflict that broadens the understanding of both.

"Margaret Schiller" is in a prologue and four acts, with scenes laid in London. In the prologue, second and fourth acts the official residence of the Prime Minister is shown. The first and third acts take place in the home of Mr. Schiller. The company provided by Charles Frohman, Klaw & Erlanger for the support of Miss Ferguson includes Norman Trevor, Ellen Van Brunt, Joseph Adelman, Marie Reinhardt, Paul Doucet, Grace Cagle, Gareth Hughes, Warburton Gamage, Frederick Bampton, Rina Hodes, Leslie Palmer, David Kambal, Lewis Sealy, Donald Patterson, Horton Cooper and Eleanor Seybold.

The new play "God and Company," which is to be produced under the auspices of the Stage Society on Monday afternoon at the Gaiety Theatre, was originally submitted for the Ames prize, which was finally given to "The Children of Earth" by Alice Brown. It was said at the time that one or two of the judges were inclined to give the prize to "God and Company," but the choice finally went to "The Children of Earth" on the ground that it was less conventional in type and broke away more from the regular traditions of the stage. On the other hand the new play by Austin Adams is written with a view to the regular requirements of the stage. When Marie Tempest was in the West the play came to her from the author. Although she had no idea that it had been previously submitted for the Ames prize she was so struck by the

strength of the drama that she immediately decided to put it into rehearsal "God and Company" is essentially an American play, with all its local color taken from the middle West, so she came to the conclusion that it was not suited to her own style of acting and was unable therefore to put it into her repertoire. But she was so impressed with the possibilities of the play that she and W. Graham Browne, who was acting with her at the time, brought it to the attention of the Stage Society and suggested that they might take a part in its production. It is exactly suited to the policy of the Stage Society, which among other things is directed toward bringing attention to plays by unknown American authors, which seem to have sufficient merit to justify their production. The play, while strong and even sensational in character, is based on incidents which have happened in real life, which are essentially American in all their bearings.

"God and Company" has been staged by W. Graham Browne, who will also play the leading part. The cast includes Misses Alma Chester, Emily Callaway, Marion Berney and Messrs. Gilbert Clayton, Edwin Holt and Harry C. Browne.

This demand will undoubtedly be reflected by important changes in the production and exhibition of films in the present year," observed John R. Freuler, president of the Mutual Film Corporation, which has been conducted

The demand for motion pictures especially calculated to interest and appeal to children has increased remarkably in the last year. The inquiries received at the exchanges of the film distributing organizations indicate the growth of a more intelligent treatment of the children patrons of the motion picture theatres and more actual considerations of their real but unvoiced demands.

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Elsie Ferguson in "MARGARET SCHILLER"



Anna Orr in "VERY GOOD EDDIE"

NEW PLAYS OF THE WEEK.

Elsie Ferguson will be seen at the New Amsterdam Theatre on Monday in "Margaret Schiller," written for her by Hall Caine, and said to be the first play that he has written, his other contributions having been first published as novels and then made into dramas.

The Stage Society after having begun with Augustus Thomas's rewritten old play "The Soul Machine" will take a piece of which Mr. Thomas approved, since he was one of the judges on the Ames competition, which produced that masterpiece "Children of Earth." "God & Company" is by Austin Adams and it is said that this play of life in the middle West almost got the prize, which went to Miss Brown.

does not touch upon its horrors. The author shows rather its effect upon the minds and hearts of people belonging to warring nations. Margaret Schiller, the part played by Miss Ferguson, who is the central figure in Mr. Caine's play, sets out to destroy the man she believes to be her country's arch enemy. She ends by saving his life. Her enthusiasm for the cause of her native land and her intense hatred of the British invade her in a plot against Sir Robert Temple, the Prime Minister. She is strongly emotional, brilliant, resourceful, but her bitter enmity centres upon the individual rather than an organized and recognized state of society. The Sir Robert Temple she has pictured and the real Sir Robert are very different. The story of the play brings these two characters into aggressive conflict, a conflict that broadens the understanding of both.

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Molly Pearson in "HOBSON'S CHOICE"

ing an investigation of this phase of the industry.

Reports have been carefully compiled by the Mutual's sixty-eight branch offices covering all English speaking America, and these tend to indicate that the motion picture is growing in favor with the schools, churches and other social institutions which concern themselves particularly with children.

"It is to be expected," observes Mr. Freuler, "that as the motion picture achieves a more substantial standing as a form of art expression there will be more sharply defined lines of demarcation between the classes of productions. There have been up to this time very few films made with the child audience in mind. These few have seldom been properly presented. It is a development that should command the attention of every motion picture theatre manager who would give his community the degree of service that means the highest success for him."

In New York city alone several years of spasmodic and incoordinated attempts at establishing children's matinees and in procuring children's educational films on the part of mothers' clubs, women's clubs, and educators have resulted this winter in the amalgamation of the various forces into the Juvenile Motion Picture Federation.

There are three departments of this federation, one known as the National Juvenile Motion Picture Board, headed by Mrs. S. P. Woodford and is an outgrowth of the motion picture committee of the Horace Mann High School's Parents and Teachers Association. Mrs. Woodford and her associates were instrumental last year in establishing a large number of children's matinees at outlying and downtown theatres. This year they decided to lend a helping hand to the women in other cities and to pass on the results of their own experiments. Knoxville, Tenn., and Washington, D. C., have been the quickest to respond although cooperation with cities as far west as the Pacific is quickly being secured. The members of the New York board see every picture designated as suitable for children by the National Board of Censorship. From these they choose the ones they wish for a school or a programme. These programmes they send on to their sister organizations in other cities.

At the first showing of each programme chosen by the committee a censorship board consisting of seven boys, ranging from 8 to 16 years of age, pass on them in their own way. Their opinions are treated with due respect, and a number of pictures chosen for particular educational or other merit have been taboed by the board of juvenile censors. The first children's matinee in New York, conducted by the National Juvenile Motion Picture Board, will be held on January 8. The city will be divided into districts, and the matinee presented at one of the most convenient houses in each district. Chaparones will be provided for unescorted children by the mothers' clubs. The expenses of the matinees will be met by the theatre managers, who also pay the board a small sum to cover their expenses.

The other two departments of the Juvenile Motion Picture Federation are the Church Motion Picture Association, of which Cleveland Moffett is the head, and an educational branch which seeks to cooperate with the schools, headed by Miss Helen Kinsley of the People's Institute.

This all points to the fact that the demand for children's films is becoming organized.

In practically fifteen years the motion picture industry has grown to the place of fifth in size in the world of commerce to-day. Some \$12,000,000 were consumed in less than the entire year of 1914 in the production of films alone, and it has been estimated that an average of 10,000,000 people attend the motion picture theatres daily.

Through statistics gathered together by Miss Helen Dore, editor of the motion picture department of the *Woman's Home Companion*, it has been ascertained that over 15 per cent of every motion picture audience is made up of children under 16 years of age. By a thorough investigation conducted among film producers to-day Miss Dore has been able to find less than 150 photographs suitable for children. One hundred and fifty films

out of the hundreds of thousands of photographs which exist, and which furnish a children's film daily, are the film corporation alone releases 112 pictures a month.

During these fifteen years educators, women's clubs and dramatic societies have lashed themselves about the child and the "movies." The fact that there has been so few children's films has been greatly deplored. It is only recently that a solution has begun to present itself.

At last the organizations have come to the realization that motion picture producers are business men and not philanthropists.

They have begun to realize that they must create a demand for children's pictures, a demand which pays in dollars and cents the producer for his trouble and money invested in the making of films. Motion picture producers manufacture their products to supply a demand. The fact that there is a demand for children's pictures is a fact which cannot be denied. It is only recently that a solution has begun to present itself.

Vaudeville and Burlesque

PALACE THEATRE—Ruth St. Denis, the distinguished American interpretative dancer, will be the particular attraction, with Ted Shawn as her dancing partner. Others include George Nash in a playlet called "The Unexpected," George MacFarlane, Sam and Kitty Morton, Belle Blanche, Oliver and Opa in "Discontent," Dainty Marie and Milo.

COLONIAL THEATRE—Maude Fealy enters vaudeville this week in a playlet by Hugh Herbert called "The Turn of the Tide." On the supporting programme will be Ralph Riggs and Katherine Witche, "The Passion Play of Washington Square," Ben Welch, Norton and Lee, the Mosconi Brothers and Paul Gordon.

ALHAMBRA THEATRE—Ben Welch, the Hebrew comedian; John Jarrot, Bancroft and Brodie, Macdon, George Howell and company in "The Red Fox Trot," Rockwell and Wood, Holmes and Buchanan, the Schmitts and others will appear.

COLUMBIA THEATRE—"The Munchies," a two act burlesque, will be presented here this week by the Liberty Girls. Among those in the company are Edna Gowan, Sam Bachan, Edna Jones, William Petrie, Tom Welch, Jeanie Ross, Kathryn Dickey and Jerry O'Donnell.

YORKVILLE THEATRE—Harry Hastings will bring his "Tango Queen" to the Yorkville this week. There is a large cast of well known performers, among them Ted Coyne, Lena Daley, Harry Tracy, Milt Frankford, William McGarry, Eleanor Reynolds, Lillian Franklin and Mlle. Devaux.

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